

Older Workers and Carework

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues the importance of considering informal carework in the context of paid work among adults over 50, as women stay in the workforce longer, workers' parents live longer, and workers' adult children experience extended periods of financial dependency. Voydanoff (2002) proposes six characteristics of paid work that are associated with well-being: *structure, norms and expectations, workplace support, quality of the work performed, the individual's orientation to work* and the *social organization* of the work itself. Adapting this framework to carework, we can describe carework in terms of *structure* – the availability of different family members and close friends as caregivers; the *social organization of care* – the level of demand or burden experienced by the caregiver; *norms and expectations for care* – e.g., the norms around reciprocity, mutuality and gendered expectations for care; *support* received by the caregiver; *orientation to care* – the level of involvement in carework; and the *quality* of the care experience. This paper uses data from the National Survey of Midlife in the United States on 1,135 workers over 50. We found that 81% of older workers provided 10 plus hours per month of carework to members of their social networks, most often in the form of emotional support. More carework hours were marginally associated with greater depressive symptoms. Among the 15% of older workers who provided instrumental carework, such as help around the house, transportation, or childcare, being employed more hours was associated with fewer depressive symptoms. In addition, greater carework at home, especially among women, was associated with greater anxiety.